

# The Immortal Aim



George Hooper Ferris

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# **The Immortal Aim**





# The Immortal Aim

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"The Formation of the New Testament"  
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PHILADELPHIA

THE GRIFFITH AND ROWLAND PRESS

BOSTON

CHICAGO

ST. LOUIS

NEW YORK

LOS ANGELES

TORONTO

WINNIPEG

BR 125  
.F 38

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Published March, 1918

MAR -2 1918

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no. 1

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I

THE IMMORTAL AIM

"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."—Phil. 3 : 11.

## I

### THE IMMORTAL AIM

**T**HERE is a type of man to whom immortality is simply an aim. If you were to stop him in the midst of the activities of life and ask him if he believes in a future existence, he would find the question a hard one to answer. Perhaps he would tell you to-day that he does, and to-morrow that he doubts. He sees no supernal visions. He has never entered into the philosophical arguments. He has not encountered any scientific objections. All that has come to him has been an experience. He has found something of imperishable worth in the common tasks of life, and has attached himself to that. Immortality? If by that you mean a distant, generalized, finished form of existence, set over against this one by way of contrast, he cannot say that he believes in it. But if you mean the discovery of elements of untold possibility in the dull and prosaic things of earth, he believes in that.

We have an excellent example of this type of man in "The Pilgrim's Progress." His name is "Mr. Honest." His experience is very different from that of the others described in the great allegory. One day there was a Post in the town

that inquired for Mr. Honest. The following communication was delivered to his hands: "Thou art commanded to be ready against this day seven-night, to present thyself before thy Lord at his Father's house." Mr. Honest is not disturbed very much by the message. He says to his friends, "As for my honesty, it shall go with me." The end of the story is described as follows: "When the day that he was to be gone was come, he addressed himself to go over the river. Now, the river at that time overflowed its banks in some places; but Mr. Honest in his lifetime had spoken to one Good Conscience to meet him there, the which he also did, and lent him his hand and so helped him over. The last words of Mr. Honest were 'Grace reigns.' So he left the world."

We all know men of that type. If belief means a formulated conviction they cannot be called "believers." They follow something sure, amid the perils and problems of life. They are steadied by the certainty of a moral value. "Honesty will go with me," they say. Honesty cannot die. No swollen river can drown honesty. In this confidence they go through life, and meet the experience of death. They wave their last farewell as nonchalantly as if they expected to be back again on the morrow.

Such men teach us that immortality is an aim, as well as a possession. We have been ruled too much in our religious thinking by the thought of



possession. Man *has* a soul, we say. He *has* a personality. He *has* duties toward his neighbor and toward God. He *has* right and wrong impulses. He *has* virtues to cultivate and vices to abandon. So we go on with our inventory of his spiritual goods. But if some one happens to ask where the owner is we are in trouble. He is not to be seen anywhere around the establishment. We seek him in some back room, but he is not there. We have had a great deal of trouble over this matter of late. Some people, who had been studying psychology, felt that they were about to discover the soul. They were deceived by some big words. They came across something called a "subliminal consciousness," and went raking around in that trying to discover the whereabouts of the soul. Somehow it never came to light. The fact is that man does not *have* a soul; he *is* one. His personality is himself. His virtues and vices are relationships, not possessions. The only sense in which they can be called possessions will come to light later on in our discussion.

If we bear this in mind we will understand the people who almost unconsciously enter into immortality. They find something in the ordinary life that is timeless. It is utterly unrelated to the onward moving years. It elevates us above the passing and the transitory. It keeps us from being afraid of the terror by night or the arrow that flieth by day. There is no great achievement of moral vic-

tory that does not contain within it this element of timelessness. There is no sacrifice of love that does not carry in its wake something of timeless worth. Such things are not carried away by the swollen river. "My honesty will go with me." Surely the will of man ought to have something to say about this problem. Faithfulness will bring its reward, even if men refuse to give it the name of "faith."

Take the "Invictus" of Henley. We need not go into the personal experiences that wrung the words from him. The story of pain and disappointment will add nothing.

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced or cried aloud;  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishment the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate;  
I am the captain of my soul.

Those words have been called "pagan" and "Stoical." Again and again it has been pointed out that they come short of "belief." Be it so! To me they are an expression of the majesty of the human soul, rising above the wreck of circumstance. They seem to cry, with Bunyan's character, "My honesty will go with me." The man who is not honest may think he believes, but he does not. He may repeat creeds, and sing songs, and cry, "Lord! Lord!" but you know him to be an unbeliever by signs more sure than these. The worker of iniquity, the man who measures his successes and defeats, his pleasures and griefs, his duties and disappointments, by the desires of the passing moment, is the man who does not believe in immortality. The man who sacrifices reality to appearance; the man who cringes before a monstrous and enthroned wickedness; the man who despairs of the ultimate triumph of downtrodden goodness—these are the men who do not believe. They have lost the eternal in the temporal.

This, therefore, would be my advice to all who are doubtful and perplexed about this matter: Strive for some aim of justice, of love, of truth, of purity, of right. There may come a time when you will realize what is involved in such an act of dedication. You awake to the unworthiness of trying, in the slightest measure, to make these great aims a means to your own happiness or welfare. They are something beyond you. They break through the narrow

limitations of your mortal existence. They bring you into the presence of a life of objective worth, of undying beauty. If you try to describe them you will find yourself unconsciously using the words "eternal" and "immortal." No other words are adequate. Do not fear. Use them. They were meant for use. They express something real. The fact is that beyond the borders of our own mortal life there opens up to us a spiritual existence that has its source in the ultimate depths of the universe. We cannot live as we ought without putting the aims of this spiritual existence above our own desires and happiness.

When we do this another thing happens. We discover that this dedication of self is the way to realize self. We find our own lives in the process of losing them. We enter on a truer, vaster, more genuine existence when we seek to serve these larger purposes. The aims of the race, the deeper meanings of existence, have been taken up into ourselves. We have become one with that great totality of moral worth and spiritual power which men have called "God." So we escape the bondage of the mortal and human and enter the undying life. That a man can do all this and not think the matter out I am firmly convinced. Such a man is unconsciously a believer. He is not afraid of the destructive forces of the universe, because there has come to him a fortifying consciousness of something that cannot die.



If this experience does not come to us in some form we cannot organize our work. Organization is unity. It must take place under some head. It implies some answer to the question, "What is the chief end of man?" It is precisely the postponing of this question that is the cause of the confusion of our day. Men are seeking absorption in work without any clear conception of the meaning and object of work. Work, to be sure, is an important essential to human existence. It is our point of contact with reality. It is the body of society. But society is a spirit as well as a body. Life cannot be entirely taken up by work. Man must interpret, and plan, and hope, and love, and think, and look behind his activities. If he does not do this he will find himself lost in utter confusion.

Is not this what has happened to many in our day? They have found nothing that transcends the monotony, the disappointment, the caprice, the chance, the selfishness of the common life. They live for the moment. As soon as we begin to do this life has a phantomlike appearance. Our existence is a never-ceasing stream of chance happenings. Our purposes come and go. Our desires are deceptive. Our ambitions, even when realized, fail to bring us the happiness we expected. We win our victories of selfishness, and they turn to defeat before our eyes. It is this that makes us cry out for something firm, for some sure support, for a life that is free from change. Mere work and activity will

not bring us this. There must be an aim behind the work that cannot be touched by the multiplicity of passing desires and the disintegrating influences of time.

“My honesty will go with me.” When a man can say that he has found a clue. He is no longer a part of the furniture of the universe. He is a victor. We are continually called upon to decide which attitude we will adopt. Something happens to make us feel the indifference of nature. The Titanic goes down. For a moment we are stunned. We see, in startling form, the absolute disregard of material forces for certain things that we have taken for granted all our lives. What cares the great sea for our distinctions? Great or mean, noble or vulgar—yes, we must say it, *true or false*, are all alike to her. What does this mean? Is there any such thing as moral worth? Does mental attainment count for nothing? Is the realm of spiritual values really non-existent?

We face the alternative squarely. We can give one of two answers to it. We can say that all these distinctions, which we have been accustomed to regard as the very essence of everything good and beautiful, are illusions, or else we can say that there is something in the life of man that is other, and more, than the material forces of the universe. How many men stood on the deck that day, as they saw it slowly sinking, saying to themselves with Mr. Honest, “My honesty will go with me”?

It is not in vain that we have striven for this. It represents something that no disaster can destroy. What is there about it that gives it this power of permanence? For one thing it is not absorbed by the desires of the moment. It transcends life, yet is immanent in it. It takes possession of me, and in that way I make it my own. This is the paradox. When the immortal life lays hold on us we lay hold on immortality. We do not grasp it in any other way. I said some time ago that we would see later in what sense immortality is a possession. We are first held, occupied, controlled by something imperishable. Then we find that this thing is a part of a Self that rises majestically above the shadows and defeats of time.

This would suggest my answer to those who declare that the belief in a future life is the product of man's desire for happiness. Doctrines of "Paradise," and the sensuous imagery employed in picturing the heavenly state, have aroused much scorn. Serious minds have always turned away from them. As a result, the theory has been advanced that the very idea of permanence was born of these low desires. The shallowness of this explanation is seen at once if we apply it to Mr. Honest. Was he seeking an aim of mere sensuous joy?

The immortal life! It shocks us in the midst of our smug complacency. It makes us dissatisfied with ourselves and our achievements. It calls us to difficulty, to strife, to sacrifice. It binds heavy

burdens upon us. It reproaches us, if ever we compromise with wrong. It hurls us against our environment with grim and relentless resolves. Is this an illusion? It has been called such. But illusions are wont to please us with pictures of deceptive joys. Illusions promise us ease and sensuous gratification. Here is something that brings trouble and toil. Yet its power over us is irresistible. Let no man tell me that this is a mere fiction of desire. Desire does not work that way.

This, then, is one form of belief. It strives for an immortal aim. We are not all alike, and our approach to this question will be along different lines. The heart may bring us belief, through a sense of the worth of another personality. Reason may convince us, with arguments like those of the "Phaedo." But there will always remain some to whom these things do not appeal. Amid the activities of life, bearing its responsibilities and carrying out its enterprises, there are some who are not given to deep meditation. It is the will that is their interpreter. The question of survival beyond the grave only comes up at rare intervals in their lives. Have they no way of attaining belief?

To them it must come through a vision of something permanent in the common things of experience. It will be a question of life itself, of its meaning and incentive. For we cannot attempt anything, we cannot trade, or study, or build, or



buy, or play, without asking ourselves such questions as these: "What object have I in this?" "What attitude shall I adopt toward the welfare and happiness of others?" "Shall I seek immediate or distant ends?" "Shall I sacrifice profit to principle or principle to profit?" Such questions arise every day. We can only answer them through a vision of immortal worth. We must learn to say, "My honesty will go with me." Then, when that experience comes which is sure to befall us all, we will find that "one Good-Conscience" comes down to the river to meet us and help us over. The transition is not so terrible if we encounter it in this spirit.



## II

“LIFE”

“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—John 10 : 10.

## II

### “LIFE”

**I**N this way Christ announces his mission. “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” The word “life” occurs very frequently in his teaching. He warns men by the solemn declaration, “Narrow is the way that leadeth unto life.” “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments,” he says. “I am the bread of life.” “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” “The words that I speak unto you, they are life.” It is evident that we have here an important word in the thought and teaching of the Master.

Let us note, at the beginning, that it is no new word in the religious experience of his people. “What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days?” asked the Psalmist. The voice of Wisdom was heard, crying, “By me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased.” An ancient proverb said of this same Wisdom, “Length of days is in her right hand.” The Twenty-first Psalm had declared of the ideal King, “He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days forever and

ever." The purpose behind one of the Ten Commandments was this, "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Of the Law and the Commandments it was said, "Length of days, and long life, and peace shall they add unto thee."

We now confront a very significant fact. Jesus seized upon this old word, but gave it a totally new meaning. In all his teaching we cannot find one instance where *life* means mere length of days. We are almost startled by this fact. The ancient records of his people were full of this conception. Yet he rejects it. His standard is qualitative, not quantitative. There is little value in a long life, if it is an empty life. It is life "more abundant" for which he would have men strive. Eternal life, to him, is not mere duration of time. It is a moral value, a spiritual state. "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." When he cries, "Let the dead bury their dead," he is commanding an absurdity, unless we lift the word life out of all temporal and material associations. "This my son was dead, and is alive again," is the cry of the old parable. What do these words mean? He was not dead. He was just lost to all things good and pure. It is evident that Jesus believed that a man may breathe, and walk the earth, and perform all the physical functions of existence, and yet be dead. If the divine within him is latent, if the powers

of his soul sleep, he is lost to life. Life does not consist in the abundance of things which we possess. Life is more than meat. If we would find our life, we must lose it. It is a moral quality. It is a spiritual energy. It is a process of soul development. The man to whom these things are an experience and a reality is alive. The man who has allowed them to depart from his soul is already dead.

I remember reading in an old book of travel about a reception that was given in the city of Cairo, in Egypt, to Slatin Pasha. Slatin Pasha was the man who saved his life by professing conversion to Mohammedanism. After that act of religious treachery General Gordon would have nothing to do with him. Gordon, the Christian soldier, the high-minded gentleman, stood firmly by his convictions. He refused to profess belief in the religion of the desert Prophet, and was cut to pieces by a fierce Mohammedan mob. Somehow the picture of that reception in Cairo took hold of my imagination. There was Slatin Pasha living on, with British and Egyptian honors heaped upon him, titled, prosperous, fêted. “Poor Gordon!” I cried. Is that right? Should I not rather cry, “Poor Slatin Pasha!” Gordon alone is alive. Who envies the traitor, with his dangling medals and his decorative scarfs? Better is it to pour out our blood on the sands of Khartum, than to continue to live, and be morally dead.



This is our judgment, when we confront the question squarely. Without honor, without self-respect, without virtue, without the approval of God, the most comfortable existence is but a blot upon the earth. Life, emptied of all that is pure and true, is a vapid and inanimate thing. This is the only death. To be showered with prosperity, to be glutted with honors, to be allowed to drag out a vain and vacant existence, bereft of all spiritual content, is the worst form of death. When this happens, the man is dead, and does not know it.

Such a man we have all seen. Behold him! Daily, imperceptibly, gradually the light went out. Under the pressure of physical needs, by the steady slackening of spiritual earnestness, through a series of minute acts of moral cowardice, by almost infinitesimal yieldings to the demands of ease, he at last reached a condition where the soul was lost, and he was not conscious of it. He thought he was successful. He prided himself on his achievements. He cried, "I am rich, and increased in goods, and have need of nothing." He could not see that he was poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked. Having gained every object of his heart's desire, having attained the goal of satisfaction, he himself was lost. The pure gold of loyalty to spiritual values, that had been tried in the fires of high endeavor; the white raiment of sincerity and candor, that covers the nakedness of the soul; the vision of divine perfection, that



shatters the serenity of a foolish pride—these he did not have. But these are the things that are the marks of one who lives.

That is a strange ceremony in which men indulge in India. The maharaja is dead. For twelve days, according to the popular belief, the naked soul of the maharaja is doomed to hover around the funeral pyre. So the body is clothed in robes of state. His horse is near. The dancing-girls dance before the “ poor white ashes.” The musicians play among the cenotaphs. The golden hookah, the sword, the water-vessel, all are near. Everything is arranged for the convenience, the ease, the gratification of the great maharaja. But the maharaja is dead.

If we could look with the eyes of Jesus, do you not think that we would sometimes see, in the social world about us, something that is spiritually similar to this? Here is a man surrounded by all the elements of luxury. He has books, but no desire to read. He has works of art, but no devotion to the beautiful. He owns stock in mills, but has no vital interest in the men who work in them. He pays for a pew in the church, but prayer is an unknown art to him, and he hires other men to make his sacrifice. He has a “ name ” that he lives, but only a name. In all that goes to make up life he is lacking.

How much there is in organized society that tends to spiritual death. Our moral sensitiveness is ever losing its keen edge, because of compromise

with polite sins, or because of surrender to established customs. The originality, the vigor, the freshness of our thought is lost, because such mental activities are ever breaking through the norms of tradition. So finally we reach that terrible condition where we never ask of a thing whether it is true, but only whether it is conventional. The same thing happens to our emotions. Deep-seated sympathy with the struggles of others is found to be an impossibility, because engagements multiply, trade absorbs, the days are short, and the problems of ministration are complex. So, while trying to live, we lose the secret of life.

Take the salt whose savor has departed. Weigh it, examine it, handle it, measure it. It has not changed in appearance a particle. Yet yesterday it was fit for food; to-day it is worthless, trodden under foot. What has gone from it? What is that ineffable, intangible, imponderable something that has slipped out of it? "Its savor," says Jesus. Merely that which makes it of value. Merely that which is its purpose in the economy of things. It possesses a certain quality, which constitutes its mission. We turn to it when we wish to produce a certain effect in the culinary art. "Salt is good."

Life is good. The thing which makes it good is to be found in its spiritual possibilities. It is good because we can fill it with love, truth, gentleness, and joy. It is good because it is a sacred vessel, that can carry certain divine values. It is good be-

cause there is a savor of righteousness and goodness, which belongs to its very essence. Let this depart, and, though its outward appearance remains unchanged, it is worthless. It is only fit to be trodden under foot. All that is left of it belongs to the clay. To be sure we are dealing with something elusive and indeterminate. This spiritual “savor” of life is hard to understand. The “natural man” cannot apprehend it, said a great spiritual leader once. It slips away without our knowing it. When it is gone we have lost the one thing which is the end and the purpose of our being.

There is a little incident which has been preserved for us by the historian Eusebius, through which we can look as a window, and see this divine truth. During the reign of Gallienus there was stationed at Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, an officer by the name of Marinus. At this time the Christians were enjoying peace. Marinus was promoted to fill a vacant position as centurion. Then there stepped forward some envious person, or perhaps, more likely, some sincere bigot, who said that Marinus was a Christian, and that no Christian could hold a Roman office, because he would not sacrifice to the emperor. Of course this was not his concern at all, but a discussion ensued, and the matter was taken to the court. The judge gave Marinus time to consider. As he left the tribunal he was met by the bishop, and together they walked to the church. In the church the bishop took hold

of a volume of the Gospels, and holding it out he pointed to the sword of Marinus, and bade him choose. Marinus grasped the Gospels. On reappearing before the judge, he steadfastly adhered to his faith, and was put to death.

I have called this incident a "window." Let us look through it. Every moral choice, every summons to sacrifice, divides men into two classes. On one side it puts all those to whom life, as expressed in this choice, is a dark patch, set against a background of eternal glory. On the other side it places all those to whom life, as expressed in this choice, is a dazzling brightness, with nothing but eternal night behind it. The former toil and sacrifice and hope. The latter indulge and compromise and enjoy. The former count ease, comfort, and even physical existence to be nothing, because they live in the light of an endless love. The latter see nothing but a black and impenetrable curtain at the end of their physical existence, and cry, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." To this philosophy Jesus would say: "No! not to-morrow. You eat, and drink, and are merry, but you are dead to-day."

"We must live," men cry. Yes, we must live, but back of that lies another problem. What is life? Answer that first, and then you are prepared to take up the corollary. Get the meaning of the word, and then construct your philosophy. Is life respiration, digestion, good sleep, quiet nerves, social plea-



tures, bodily comforts? Or is it truth, justice, integrity, purity, a love that lights up earth's darkness, a faith that looks into eternity? Until this question is settled there is no meaning in the words, "We must live."

A tourist is in Rome. He spends an entire forenoon in a little shop haggling for a string of corals that he could buy as cheaply at home. The forum and the Colosseum are but a short distance away. He has not seen them. The next morning his party starts for Florence. He is gone from Rome forever and has not seen its monuments of antiquity. Why did he go there? Why did he cross the ocean? It is strange that he never asks himself this question. It is the one thing he should have settled before he set foot on the other side.

"We must live," men say. Those are serious words. They involve some conception of why we are here in the world. They go down to the very depths of a philosophy of destiny. It is possible to pass through the experiences and circumstances of life, and miss their meaning entirely. We do not remain in Rome forever. If any fact can be regarded as established, beyond the possibility of denial, it is that we belong to a procession that moves on. Our time is limited. We may object to "doctrinal sermons," but we all have our doctrines. We show what we think of life by what we do with it. We choose, and in that choice we reveal what we believe.

An Alpine climber sometimes reaches a place where torn garments and abrasions of the skin amount to nothing. He clings to the rocks, bruises his hips, scrapes his elbows, ruins his clothes, and counts these disasters as nothing, if he attains the desired height. He does not seek such experiences. He just accepts them when they come. If he said anything about them, it would be this, "They are the price of the peak." "Earth gets its price," said Lowell. He might have said that so does heaven. If life has any worthfulness, any secret, any divine content, it is our business to find out what that is, and be ready to pay for it. This is what Jesus meant by the parable of a merchant who sold everything that he had to get possession of a pearl. There is a "goodly pearl" hidden in this life of ours. What is it?

Failure to solve this problem has been the degradation of nations. It has given birth to those times of unbridled pleasure, that are ever the signs of national decadence. Lust for enjoyment seizes upon mankind as a sort of frenzy. The sections of society that set the example for the rest fling themselves headlong into the delirious pursuit of luxury. Enticed from paths of truth and honor, they go wandering in the magic gardens of pleasure. This is national death. It was once the habit of historians to try to prove that the luxury of ancient Rome was the cause of her downfall. In all probability this is not true. One thing, however, we can say, if we

look at the matter with the eyes of Jesus. When sensuousness, lust, the pride of display, the passion for unreality, the greed of wrongful gain, seized upon the Eternal City, though the fear of her mighty legions was felt in the uttermost parts of the earth, she was dead.

“ I am come that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly.” These words express the conception which Jesus had of life. Its sign was emancipation from all slavery to the sensuous, and sincere devotion to spiritual desires and moral qualities. The cry of resurrection is heard in the words, “ This my son was dead, and is alive again.” He has flung off the fetters of his sensuality. The memory of the higher joys in the Father’s house has conquered the lust that held him so long in the far country. This is life. It is to fill the passing hours with the purposes of eternity, to find the gold of truth in the slag of circumstance. He who does this has already entered upon the endless life. The quickened energies of the mind, the aroused activities of the heart, the ruddy glow of an earnest devotion to principle, are the signs of our resurrection. They show that we have heard the trumpet call that summons faith from the grave of unbelief. They show that we have entered upon that new career, the gift of the spirit of Christ to us, whose motto is not “ Long Life ! ” but “ More Abundant Life.”





### III

“A LIFE TO LET”

“When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out, and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”—Matt. 12 : 43-45.

### III

#### “A LIFE TO LET”

**W**HEN the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out, and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

This is as true a picture to-day as when drawn by Jesus in Palestine so many centuries ago.

For one glorious moment this man stood at the gates of liberty. He won his battle. He took up arms against a tyrannous habit, and vanquished it. He played the man, and experienced the joy of breathing the air of freedom. What a sublime moment is that which experiences a moral triumph! Will anything compare with it? But this man forgot that to empty the soul of evil is not to fill it with good. So the very hour of his victory proved to be his undoing. The negative nature of his reform left him restless, discontented, unemployed. The old channels, cut in his character by long years

of habit, still invited the forces of his being to return. Having nothing else to do, unable to find satisfaction in spiritual vacuity, he rushed back into his old condition, with appetites and desires intensified by a brief vacation. He was the victim of "A Life to Let."

I doubt if a deeper psychological analysis was ever made than this. Behind the popular notion of "unclean spirits" we read a lesson that lies at the basis of all our modern science of psychology. It is the tremendous truth of the inhibition of ideas. It is the never-dying problem of the balance of psychic forces. In proportion as the soul has within it a love of adventure, a restless ambition, a passion for the heroic, a delight in danger, a desire to mount to heights unattained, in that proportion will it be capable of some of the lowest deeds and vilest practices that mark the limits of human baseness. Unless given tasks worthy of its powers, it will plunge inevitably into depths of wickedness. A criminal career is often but the protest of a powerful nature against the limitations of ignorance and the monotony of emptiness. Let us look through this parable to-night, and see what we can learn about the unclean spirits of Vacuity.

The first thing I find in it is *a denial of the gospel of negation*. The world is full of people whose whole claim to goodness is based on what they *did not do*. Their virtue is like that of a sandheap, that bears neither pigweed nor grain. Their

purity is like that of a blank sheet of paper, that tells neither lies nor truths. If life had no possibilities, if the soul had no destiny, if divine powers within us never cried out for divine tasks without us, these people would be candidates for the calendar of saints.

Suppose a farmer were to say: "If I sow my wheat in the ten-acre lot, the birds may get it; if I sow it in the back meadow the fences over there are poor, and the cows may break in and trample it down; if I plow up the pasture, over behind the woods, and put it there, the ground is low, and it may rot. I guess, on the whole, the wisest thing to do is to leave it in the bin in the granary." That is an excellent decision, save for one thing. How about the broad acres that are lying idle? Have they no destiny beyond the production of thistles and mullen-stalks? How long will it take for the taxes to eat them up, if they are doing nothing?

I have only one complaint to make against the man whose claim to goodness is based on the evil he has avoided. He is not good. Goodness is something positive. Goodness does not come from the negation of wickedness, any more than lettuce is sure to grow in the place in the garden where we root up sheep-sorrel. It grows if we plant it. It is the product of a definite effort. It is the reward of a particular line of activity. So is goodness. We may stand in the temple of our self-



satisfaction, and cry with perfect truthfulness that we are not like a lot of other men, "extortioners, unjust, adulterers," and all the while be densely blind to the fact that "seven other devils," of pride and conceit and laziness and scorn and selfishness and contempt and inhumanity, have crept into the garnished chambers of our purity, and are holding high revel while we pray.

Of what value is it to a man that he has refrained from this wrong, or kept out of that wickedness? Does this tell anything about him? Because a man never ran an engine off a track in his life, it does not follow that he ever ran one *on* a track. Because a man never made a mistake in the conjugation of a Greek verb, it does not follow that he ever mastered the Greek alphabet. Suppose you wanted a bookkeeper. There might come to you a man who could not count up to twenty-five, applying for the position, and saying with perfect truthfulness that he never in his life made a mistake in the addition of a column of figures. Of course not. He never learned to add. I confess that I feel very much as you might under such circumstances, when I meet a man who is able to recite a long list of the dishonest deacons he has met, of the preachers he has known to be frauds, of the Sunday School teachers who have fallen into sin. I want to ask: "Well, what of that? Did you ever try to attain any goal of goodness, or reach any height of righteousness?"

There is very little danger of falling until we begin to climb. It is the man who aspires to the peaks who walks on the edge of the precipice. It is the man who loves the land of vision who is caught in the treacherous snows. These men sometimes fall. The only safe men are men who are nothing but safe. If they remain in the valleys with the cows they will never fall. But let us not forget that theirs is a bovine virtue. It is bought by abandonment of their manhood. What right have they to say anything about the disasters on the heights? Only the men who are climbing have any business to pass judgment on those who fall. Let me tell you how to distinguish the men who are climbing. When a comrade loses his grip and plunges into the depths, instead of making merry, or exalting themselves, they pause for a few moments in awful suspense and before they go on they utter the prayer, "God be merciful!"

Another thing I learn from this parable. I find in it an *explanation of restlessness*. Here was an emancipated man walking through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none. It is the picture of an unemployed energy. It speaks of the misery of emptiness. If you strike my arm when it is hanging idly at my side, the muscle will pain me for a long time. If you strike it when it is tense and rigid, engaged in some occupation, strained by some labor, I shall scarcely feel it. The worries, the annoyances, the blows of life fall upon the soul

with much the same result. The man whose energies are bent toward some ideal, whose hopes are busy, whose faith is active, whose love is engaged in toil, will scarcely know it when the stroke of misfortune falls. Even great calamities may befall such a man, without utterly incapacitating his courage. But once let him settle down to the business of avoiding trouble, and he will be just the man whom disaster is forever following. His very efforts to escape all slander will cause the sting of calumny to remain for a long time in his soul. His very desire to take life easy and enjoy himself will make him extremely sensitive to the pain of each mishap.

The bright new tools which I bought for my cabin in the country began to get rusty the first winter. As long as they were in use during the summer they kept their brilliancy. Discontent is a kind of rust, that attacks an inactive life. A man retires from business, fancying that he will be happy, now that he has nothing to do. Before the first week is over the rust of restlessness gets after him. He begins to find that his new life has nothing in it. The slack and passive joys of indolence grow insipid because of their very sweetness. He longs for the old, rough life, when he had obstacles to face, problems to solve, risks to run, triumphs to win. There was joy in that life. He had an appetite, when he had no time to think of his dinner. He could sleep, when he had to crawl out of bed



in the dark each morning to get to work. But when that delightful time came, of which he had been dreaming so long, that time when he had nothing on earth to do but to eat and sleep, he had as constant companions two new friends, Indigestion and Insomnia.

Moths do not attack a garment while it is being worn. It is the coat that is locked up for safe-keeping, the dress that is tied up in a bundle and laid away on the top shelf of a closet, that comes out by and by utterly ruined. Discontent is a germ that breeds rapidly in the stuffy atmosphere of inactivity. It hunts out the hiding-place of the indolent. Why do we not remember this when we are busy? People who are engaged with life's toils and problems, observing that there is a certain amount of wear and tear on happiness in the stress and drudgery of daily duties, are quite likely to imagine that they can keep it longer if they hide it. So they pack it away in some corner of selfishness, or hang it up in some garnished chamber of the soul. Then the moths of misery begin to get after it. The last state of these people is worse than the first.

There is another thing I find in this parable. It is a *challenge to give God the heroic side of life*. This man allowed the divine energy and fearless faith that drove the unclean spirit out of his breast to sink into uselessness. With a world full of problems and opportunities, with society calling for

moral heroes, with a kingdom of righteousness outside his doors, he gave the new-born power no great task to perform. He did not connect the resurrection force of purity within him with the divine demands of duty without him. He did not see that the solution of his own problem was but the first sentence in the story of a redeemed world.

I believe we face a new era in religion. Within the walls of the church we are hearing a new cry. We face the dawn of an age of social responsibility. The immoralities of custom-ports are not things outside the realm of religious duty. The shocking deeds of a Sugar Trust are a challenge to those who pray, "Thy kingdom come!" The tremendous problems of municipal regeneration are calling for a Christianity that is morally militant. The church has a larger mission to perform than was thought a generation ago. To sing songs of thanksgiving to God for saving "a wretch like me," is all right, but it does not cover the whole area of religious duty. To dry the tears of sorrow, to cheer the heart of the unfortunate, to relieve the distress of poverty, is noble, but we cannot find the spirit of victory here. Religion is not simply an ambulance; to follow in the rear of the march of civilization. It ought to lead. It is what men saw in it in olden times—a cloud-pillar, to lead us on to sublime accomplishments, to social freedom, to realms of opportunity, to a national destiny.

The most serious objection I have to President Eliot's "Religion of the Future" is its lack of prophetic challenge. It attempts to prophesy, but does not do it. It analyzes, but does not command. With nearly everything he says about outgrown dogmas I find myself in agreement, but when I finish reading I am ready to cry, "Has the religion of the future nothing to do but to thank God for having cast out an unclean spirit of superstition?" I confess that I weary of one kind of "liberality." There is a liberality that is just a mawkish atmosphere of theological satisfaction, a tepid environment of cultured contentment that relaxes the moral nature. If one per cent of the people in our city, who call themselves "liberal," would consent to unite for serious purposes, we would march with mighty strides toward the kingdom of righteousness.

There is a condition of soul that is like a piece of untwisted cotton cord, that is all frayed out. It is just an aggregation of slack shreds. If you put an ounce of weight on it, it will break. When will we learn that "liberality" is not looseness? For men and women to call themselves "liberal," when the slightest weight of responsibility breaks the integrity of their will, is to drag down a great and noble word. You might as well try to tow a ship with oakum, as to endeavor to drag the world on toward its destiny with the sort of spirit that is generally called "liberal." It is not enough to cast

out old dogmas. When the mind is "empty, swept, and garnished," it is in its greatest danger. Only belief will conquer the world. Before us goes the pillar of fire. There are barriers yet to be crossed. There are obstacles now to be faced. There are discouragements to be met in these very days of ours. For this, we must have boldness, resolution, invincible courage, a self-reliant faith.

I once heard a man say in prayer-meeting, "All I want to do is just to get to heaven." If you had asked him what he meant by "get to heaven," he might have been confused. In the end he would have spoken of escape from temptation, of the lifting of burdens, of the end of strife. He did not realize the stagnation that would exist in such a paradise. He could not foresee that "mansions in the skies," of which nothing could be said, except that they are "empty, swept, and garnished," would be most tiresome places. We would soon get weary of their neutral tints, and colorless virtues. A moment's reflection will reveal the truth in the cry of Whittier's character:

God forgive me if I say  
It would be hard to sit there night and day,  
Like an image in the Tribune, doing naught,  
With these hard hands, that all my life have wrought  
Not for bread only, but for pity's sake.

The philosopher Leibnitz, in a letter to Christian Wolff, says that if future blessedness does not con-



sist in progress, there can be no destiny for the blessed, except a state of stupefaction. Is not that true? If you think you could be happy sitting on a throne, playing a harp, throughout all eternity, just try it for a week next summer down at the seashore. The foolishness of this dream was discovered thousands of years ago in India. Certain Sankhya teachers declared, away back there in the twilight of human thinking, that the man who gains admission into the heavenly world will soon discover that there are higher stages than that which he has attained, and that even heavenly joys are but a preparation for nobler ones, there are heavens beyond heaven.

Do we not observe, on earth, that a man does not escape the laws of his being by journeying in distant lands? Whether he tries to climb a mountain in Switzerland, or face the Berbers of Africa, or kill tigers in the jungle of India, he takes himself with him. If he has surrendered to injustice at home, he will turn back in fear when he faces the first couloir in the Alps. If he has bowed down to political chicanery or commercial mendacity in his native land, he will lose his manhood the moment he comes into the presence of the free Bedouin of the desert. Finely did Plato say that a change of skies does not change the character. Do you imagine it will be any different on the long journey which we all expect to take some day? For my part, I find great wisdom and inspiration in

the lines of Matthew Arnold, entitled "Immortality":

Foiled by our fellow-men, depressed, outworn,  
We leave the brutal world to take its way,  
And, "Patience! in another life," we say,  
"The world shall be thrust down, and we upborne."

And will not, then, the immortal armies scorn  
The world's poor, routed leavings? or will they  
Who failed under the heat of this life's day  
Support the fervors of the heavenly morn?

No, no! the energy of life may be  
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;  
And he who flagged not in the earthly strife,

From strength to strength advancing,—only he,  
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,  
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.

IV

“THE LIGHT OF IMMORTALITY”



“If a man die, shall he live again?”—Job 14 : 14.

“Our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”—2 Tim. 1 : 10.

## IV

### "THE LIGHT OF IMMORTALITY"

**I**F a man die, shall he live again?" This question of Job has been asked in all ages. You can see it written on the limestone cliffs back of the old lost city of El Kab. You can hear it in the howl of the winds under the crumbling domes of the Tombs of the Sheiks at Assuan. I have gone half-way around the world, and the last thing I saw before sailing was the falling of tears on the cold sod under the elms of New England, and almost the first thing I heard after landing was the wail of the Arabs among the sandy mounds out on the margin of the desert. On those strange funeral reliefs, that lined the Ceramicus between Athens and Eleusis, we catch a different glimpse of the light-hearted Greek from the one that has come down to us in history. These bits of art, the productions of the common workmen of the long ago, have about them a pathos that is inexpressibly touching. The extending of the hand to hold back the departing, the sad farewell, the gathering of friends, the peering into the gloom, all tell the old story. "If a man die, shall he live again?"

The belief in immortality sometimes escapes us

because of its very vastness. Never was this more common than to-day. Astronomy comes to us to tell of suns journeying through space, according to the receding and lengthening waves of the spectroscope, at the rate of about a thousand miles a minute, whose distances from us in the abyss of night are so great that it will take fifty thousand years for them to be moved an appreciable distance on the map of the heavens. Thought staggers at such a conception, and we cry with the ancient singer of Israel, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him?" I step on an ant-heap, and kill a hundred or two of industrious little creatures. I boil some water, and put out of existence countless multitudes of animalcules. Is my life, when put in figures given us by the distance of the stars Mizar and Alcyone, of any more importance to the universe than that of these creatures? Like hills and clouds and rivers, am not I too held and governed by unbending laws, in whose enactment I had no voice, and whose inert power makes and ends me? Am I anything more than a victim of the forces that fashion the trees and wear down the mountains, that mold the hail and govern the winds? Sometimes, from the presence of the great powers of nature, we come forth ready to cry:

Mountains and ocean waves  
Around me lie,  
Tower the mountain chains  
Forever to the sky:

Fixed is the ocean immutably—  
 Man is a thing of naught,  
 Born but to die.

A life of nothing, nothing worth,  
 From that first nothing ere our birth  
 To that last nothing under earth.

Materialism is often a religion. With profound humility it belittles man's place in the universe. It assures us we are but grains of dust, comminuted and cast off by the great grinding mechanism about us. What have we to do with our destiny? Like a log of wood, carried on the current of a stream, so do we pass through time. From the laboratory of science this theory comes forth, assuring us that we are just a chance concourse of atoms, organized into human form—atoms that yesterday may have entered into the composition of a thorn-bush or a bit of limestone. Mere material effects of physical causation, our end is dust. In exquisite and imaginative strains we find this thought again and again in the musical stanzas of Omar Khayyam:

For I remember stopping by the way  
 To watch a potter thumping his wet clay:  
 And with its all-obliterated Tongue  
 It murmured, “Gently, Brother, gently, pray!”

And has not such a story from of old  
 Down Man's successive generations roll'd,  
 Of such a clod of saturated Earth  
 Cast by the Maker into human mould?

Is that all? Am I just a "clod of saturated earth?" Let me tell you why I believe I am not.

In the first place, *I believe in immortality because of the soul's persistence.* If I am a mere collection of material particles, the dissolution of those particles, I grant, will mean my extermination. If there is nothing in me but certain delicately constructed and nicely strung nerve-wires, for the transmission of sensation and thoughts, then the destruction of these wires will amount to my destruction. But I am something more than these: for long after the experience has passed away, and each separate particle in my body has changed, I still retain a memory, showing that my true self is something more than the organism through which it works. Science is ever talking to us about persistence. No force is ever destroyed, it says. When a cannon-ball strikes an iron plate with a crash, the energy that sent it whizzing through the air, we are told, is not lost; it is only transformed. When a stone falls over a precipice and strikes on the pile of rocks at its base, the momentum of its fall does not vanish utterly; it is simply changed into some other channel. When a tree is cut down in the forest, and sawed into lumber, or cut up for the fireplace, the power that expressed itself in trunk and branch is not annihilated; it is just made to express itself in some other way.

Why cannot we apply this law in a still higher way? There are certain forces that never have



expressed themselves through the crass and material substances of earth, and never can. There is no atomic weight of love. There is no specific gravity of faith. There is no Troy measure of honesty. Do these forces therefore perish? When Socrates died, and with a brave farewell to the few friends gathered about him in the hour of martyrdom declared that he was not going out into utter darkness, what became of the wonderful mind, the robust moral earnestness, the pure spiritual insight, the invincible love of righteousness, that for so many years had been the light of Athens? When Copernicus died, what became of the courage, the endurance, the large-minded earnestness, that perforated the walls of the humble chamber in Allenstein in order to observe the passage of the stars across the meridian? When Savonarola died, what became of the faith, the prophetic insight into the future, that enabled him to walk into the fires of death, declaring to the Bishop of Vasona that it was not within the power of the great Church of Hildebrand to separate him from the “ Church Triumphant ”? When John Huss died, and the old prayer of the “ Kyrie Eleison ” was stifled in the smoke, what became of the self-sacrifice that gave up the rectorship of the University of Prague, in order to become a wanderer on the earth? Are these powers, so spiritual, so sublime, so godlike, any less likely to endure than those which manifest themselves in the rock, the tree, or the river? I cannot think so. Atoms, how-



ever finely organized, do not say, "I love!" "I believe!" "I worship the Highest!" "I sacrifice my own interests to the general good!" "I refuse to bow before triumphant wickedness!" "I cast in my lot with oppressed and downtrodden goodness!" Here, I believe, we stand in the presence of the highest energy manifested to man. Of that energy I declare: "It persists! It cannot be blotted out!"

Again, *I believe in immortality because of the soul's endowments.* How few of the powers of our humanity are required just to get along in this world! The residue of our faculties, the overplus of ability, the forces upon which we never make levies to supply our material wants, are infinitely more than those which are called into requisition by the daily needs of the body.

A man goes up to Moosehead Lake on a fishing excursion of two weeks. He charts all the ships in Boston and New York harbors. He exhausts all the quarries in the Adirondacks, and in New Hampshire and Vermont. He takes with him an army of builders and stonecutters, and all the best architects in the country. You ask him what all this is for, and he answers that he intends to remain in the woods for a few nights, and must build him a little fisherman's shack. What would be your conclusion? Either that the man was crazy, or that he really intended to build something greater. Man comes into this world with powers and faculties

within him for building something whose sublimity and beauty extends far beyond our loftiest conception. What shall we say of the philosophy that asserts that all these powers—of disinterested love, of moral heroism, of far-reaching righteousness, of self-sacrificing generosity, of godlike compassion, were merely intended to build a fisherman's shack beside the shores of time? To doubt our immortality is to charge the Ruling Power of the universe with madness. Why build an engine that exhausts the working forces and the ingenuity of the Corliss shops, in order to run a grindstone, and sharpen a jack-knife? The end is not equal to the expenditure. Why construct a being with the ability to accomplish divine and infinite things, and then give him nothing to do but to earn bread and butter?

Again, *I believe in immortality because of the soul's unity.* Each person in this church is a special and particular entity, possessed of an individuality, the like of which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. We may arrange men in classes. We may note their likenesses. We may group them according to the characteristics which they share in common. When all this is done we shall find that we cannot get away from the fact that the essence of each one's character is different from that of any one of his fellows, and the one thing that makes him a man is something in which no one else in the universe can have participation.

I ask you to describe Washington. You relate

incidents of his early life. You quote from his biographers, Weems and Ramsay. You give comments on his personality by this great historian, and that. You tell of inspiring deeds of patriotic devotion, that are kept as treasures in the memory of a nation. When all this is done the real Washington has escaped us. Aristotle well said that "the individual is the indefinable." Bosworth may follow Johnson around day after day, and note down every trifling remark that falls from his lips, and still the "Great Bear" escapes us. Ellinwood may take down in shorthand the prayers of Henry Ward Beecher, when the soul of the preacher is poured out in supplication to the infinite, and may follow him into the prayer-meeting to gather together the little incidents of autobiography that escape his lips, and still the real Beecher gets away from us. When we try to describe an individual we are shut up to stereotyped expressions that do not express.

Ask the lover for a description of his sweetheart, and you will hear the same old tender expressions, that have been heard in every land, and in every language, since the world began. You remember Bayard Taylor's description of the song the soldiers sang in the trenches of Sebastopol, on the night before the battle:

They lay along the battery's side  
Below the smoking cannon:  
Brave hearts from Severn and from Clyde,  
And from the banks of Shannon.

They sang of love, and not of fame;  
 Forgot was Britain's glory:  
 Each heart recalled a different name,  
 But all sang, "Annie Laurie."

It is always the same old story, of one who is "the fairest that e'er the sun shone on"; and yet if you ask the lover if another could be found just as fair, who was in every way the exact reproduction of the dear one, could he transfer his affections, what will he reply? He will say that there is no other, and if there were it would not be *She*. That this individuality, which is the source of so much that is sweet, and noble, and divine, in our lives, can come to an end some day, is to me a thing unthinkable.

*I believe in immortality because of the soul's aspirations.* Here we are fighting away, with secret faith and dauntless courage, resisting tyrannies, conquering greed, mastering selfishness, only to be stricken down ere the battle is well begun. If that is all, we can apply in tragic manner the words of Christ, "This man began, but was not able to finish." This life is but a suggestion. The poem stops in the middle of a line. The chord is broken at the very beginning. What can we believe save this: We shall take it up again, when we wake with brighter hope and braver faith. We shall carry its pervading idea, which here has been but an intimation, into movements more glorious and strains more sublime. The chords in the soul that give forth



life's sweetest music, that thrill with love, vibrate with triumph, ring with joy, and peal with hope, are somehow tuned to a belief in immortality. Therefore I declare that a revelation of God is required, not to prove immortality, but to disprove it.

Why look up, if all above is Blank? Why extend our pleading arms to Vacancy? Why utter our prayers to Emptiness? Why sob out a cry for forgiveness to a cold, dumb, frozen Necessity? A being with such tendencies and powers implanted within him, if there be nothing to correspond to them beyond him, is the supreme jest of the universe—a phantom of falsity decked out in cap and bells, that he fondly dreams are emblems of royalty. Nietzsche is right. Life is just a joke, and this little planet of ours is merely a side-show in the ridiculous farce of the universe.

Nietzsche is not right. Truth, not deception, lies at the heart of things. For every aspiration we find satisfaction somewhere. When a migratory instinct drives the lark back from his southern home, it is not a vain hope that leads him, for he finds the region of the old nest at last. When a mysterious longing begins to move in the heart of the winged seed of the elm to reach up through the soft yielding soil into a world of warmth and brightness above, it is not deceived, for the young shoot soon finds the higher realm. When the larva of the *Antiopa* grows restless within the dark wrapping that enfolds it, and longs to break its bonds and

be out on the wing like a detached flower, it is not yielding to a delusion and a mockery, for the hour soon comes when it spreads its wings among the fragrant blossoms of the meadow. Nor can I believe that the aspirations of the human soul are merely a sublime deception. The unawakened possibilities of life, the power and faculties not yet realized, the dreams and longings of heights unattained, and all the stirrings of better and larger things that visit the soul—these were not given to us to tantalize us, and mock us, and lead us after a phantom. I know not how, I know not when, but I know! What frost-bound faculties and sleeping forces lie latent in the unexplored depths of the soul, who can tell? What flowers shall bloom, what fragrance shall come, what joy and sweetness and splendor shall be ours, when life sweeps around into the May of God's love, it hath not “ entered into the mind to conceive.”

How do the rivulets find their way?  
 How do the flowers know the day,  
 And open their cups to catch the ray?  
 I see the germ to the sunlight reach,  
 And the nestlings know the old bird's speech;  
 I do not see who is there to teach.  
 I see the hare from the danger hide,  
 And the stars through the pathless spaces ride;  
 I do not see that they have a guide.  
 He is Eyes for All who is eyes for the mole;  
 All motion goes to the rightful goal;  
 O God! I can trust for the human soul.





V

KEEPING LENT

“Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”—Matt. 6 : 16-18.

## V

### KEEPING LENT

JESUS does not oppose fasting. As an expression of humility and self-restraint he saw its value. He also saw its emptiness when there was no such spirit to express. There were some to whom the whole thing was theatrical. They wore their sackcloth with pride. The rent garment, intended to indicate a broken spirit, was to them a badge of honor, or a decoration of authority. The ashes, symbolic of burnt hopes and vanished desires, were seen on people whose souls were full of the impulses of selfishness and greed.

So Jesus said to his disciples: "If you would keep a fast, do not let any one know it. Live as you would in a time of feasting and joy. Put on the emblems of happiness. Express your grief and repentance to God. Do not make a show of it. Conceal it. True penitence dreads display. It shrinks from the crowd of onlookers. It is supremely and intensely individual."

Have you violated your sense of right? God knows all about that. Have you met with loss and disaster? It will not help matters any to hang out

a sign. That may bring you a little professional sympathy, but other people have their problems. Take hold of yours with the help of the unseen Father. Be courageous and hopeful. Carry into the world a spirit of resolution. Things will right themselves by and by. "The Father, who seeth in secret, will reward thee openly."

I write this down as a rule: In everything that touches the deepest emotions there is a tendency to allow the expression to take the place of the reality. That is why tragedy is the highest form of the histrionic. How can people go to a place where a gruesome murder is enacted before them on a stage, and call that "amusement"? We watch Othello slay Desdemona, and pronounce it "splendid." It is just a story. Of course we do not imagine for a moment that it is real. We "enjoy" the scene of the bloody hands in Macbeth because it is such a superb representation of the horrible. But the word "hypocrite," which Jesus uses in this passage, means an actor. What he is trying to say is that when the same thing happens to the solemn truths of religion they are degraded.

Let us take a few of the tragedies of life, and see how they tend to become theatrical. Take *poverty*. There are people who wear their rags of adversity with as much pride as the queen of England feels over her coronation robe, or the archbishop of Seville takes in his ecclesiastical garments. It is a business to these beggars. They

extract money from people by their "get-up." Their capital is a threadbare garment, or a physical deformity.

The most hideous creatures of this type are to be seen near the sacred sights in Jerusalem. Some of the wealthy mendicants of that city are factotums in its life. They own property everywhere. Who supports them? Russian pilgrims, who have walked a large percentage of the way to the Holy Land, sleeping at night on the bare ground under the old olive trees, have poured a stream of alms into the boxes of these deceivers. Of course, if we believe that we can buy our way into heaven by our gifts, there must be some one to receive. You can see the same thing enacted on the steps of cathedrals in Europe, and on the sidewalk near churches in Philadelphia. I have seen these beggars working under a padrone, or "boss." He was hiding around a corner. They would make their pitiful plea, secure the gift, and then carry it to him. This was a Beggar Trust.

In the meanwhile what happens? The world is full of poverty that is real, but we do not know it. There are unwritten stories of heroism displayed in battles with despair. The hero employs no "press-agent." You would never suspect a fight was going on. Self-respect seals the lips. The old garments are mended and brushed up. The home is kept as attractive as possible. Self-denial is the common experience of the day. It has to be,



in order to keep the children dressed and educated. The whole atmosphere of this home of intense poverty is one of dignified and heroic hope. If you enter it you will find your thought of humanity elevated. Yes, the world is full of poverty. The good Father, who sees in secret, knows that. But it does not "appear unto men to fast."

Take *grief*. I well remember a sight in Cairo that attracted my attention. It was the first time I had seen it. A procession of wailing women passed. They uttered moans, and shrieks, and heart-rending cries. They flung their arms aloft, tore their hair, and went through all the extravagant manifestations of grief so common in the Orient. I was told they were hired mourners. There are women who make a business of mourning. They take it off your hands for you. You pay them to show the world how broken-hearted you are, and then you can go off to the café, and sit there all day, smoking your narghile.

Does that shock us? Why should it? In the country town in which I was born in Wisconsin it was customary to hold funeral services in the church. People felt that they were cheated by a private funeral. The neighbors came from far and wide to see how the mourners took it. I was once the victim of that system. I was just a little fellow. A brother was sick with a fever. He asked me to sit by the bed and fan him. I wanted to go out to play, and refused. That night he died. At

the funeral I felt like the lowest and vilest criminal on earth, but I shut my teeth, and refused to cry. I would not satisfy that crowd by any such display. I was called "cold-hearted," but I did not care. I was proud of my ability to hold in.

There is plenty of grief in the world. The Father, who sees in secret, knows that. But we cannot identify grief with its expression. It is not measured by the breadth of a band of crape. Custom has its dictates, which we can obey, or reject. Sable garments, worn for the proper number of months, are no indication of the length of memory. We lay them aside. The theatrical manifestation of grief is over. Twenty years pass. A half a century is gone. Some day there comes to us an experience that brings up a whole train of events from the shadowy realm of the past.

Take *failure*. How many people peddle their failures. They buttonhole you on the street. They corner you at the club. They wander into your office in the busiest hour of the day. You say: "There comes Watkins. I suppose I must listen once more to the story of how he invested a thousand dollars in Missouri Pacific." Or, "There is poor Barton. I wonder if he still has his balance-sheet with him, to show how much money he lost last year." It is a sort of business with these men. They traffic in their troubles. They trade them to you for a sufficient amount of sympathy. If they do not get it, they feel that they have been wronged.

Some of them have an excellent story. They have rehearsed it often. All they need is a little low musical accompaniment to make it most effective. You have to listen to it down to the fourth scene of the fifth act. How distressing are these people with their failures, who "appear unto men to fast."

But we must not conclude that all men are like these. There are men who would feel humiliated by the slightest confession of failure. They dare not admit it even to themselves. Though they hover on the edge of bankruptcy, they do not draw back in terror, but drive right on. You would never suspect that there was any crisis in their affairs.

Some one said of Blücher that he seemed stronger after each defeat. Nine times he was beaten in battle, and nine times he rallied his scattered forces and stood more firm and formidable than ever. We all know men like that. They march back resolutely into the field. If there is a cup of disappointment for them to drink, they drain it in their own tent, and then resume operations.

There is a vast army of these people known only to God. They are victims of social injustice, but they refuse to blame circumstance. They do not wail and condemn. Though they bear an aching heart and an anxious mind, they appear contented. They are distressed by misfortune; they are disappointed in friendship; they are victims of harsh misrepresentation; they feel behind them the haunt-

ing of some hereditary weakness; they see their dreams of glorious achievements vanish in the daylight of reality. All this happens "in secret."

Such people find it impossible to expose their life problem to the gaze of others. They do not want help, especially when it involves a condescending sympathy. The last citadel of character would be abandoned if self-respect surrendered. So they cover up everything. They appear happy and contented. Battling with fatal diseases that are slowly sapping their life strength, fighting financial difficulties that threaten to break up the home, struggling to bear up under the loss of a life incentive, they say nothing, and take up the routine of life bravely and cheerfully.

Let me contrast two men. Both of them had wealth, so we can easily eliminate that side of the situation. One is Robert Browning. Many men have undertaken to write his biography, and the differences of opinion have been great. On one subject, however, there has been absolute agreement. Without exception, all admire the brave, hopeful, manly spirit he displayed in the presence of difficulty. He was ridiculed mercilessly for the obscurity of his thought. He waited nearly fifty years for recognition as a poet. He married an invalid, who entertained what seemed to him strange opinions on spiritualism and other subjects. But his manly devotion, despite this difference, caused their marriage to be pronounced "ideal." For her sake he



lived the life of an exile. Was there any struggle? Where shall we look for it? Certainly not in any minor strains in his poems. He never posed for sympathy. He never prepared a stage-setting for his sorrows. We see indications now and then of the wrestlings of a heroic spirit. We feel that there was something personal in the praise of one "who never turned his back." At the end we hear just a little note in the "Prospice," as he faces the last grim enemy, "I was ever a fighter." We admire him for this, and for his picture of the reunion with his companion.

What a contrast there is between Browning and Byron. The latter was ever exploiting his troubles. He knew just when to draw the curtain on the act. There is no finer piece of passionate satire in our language than "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers." Some of the deepest pathos in poetry was written about the gross immoralities of this man. The slightest criticism stung him to reply. He loved to pose. We feel the lack of a genuine sincerity in his weird exhibitions of emotion.

All this has been preparatory to our topic. We have entered on the period of "Lent." In the Gospel according to Matthew, we read that Jesus fasted forty days in the wilderness, in the time of his temptation. It is not easy to reconcile this statement with certain theories of the person of Christ that have been held all through the centuries. Why did he fast? It was surely not for the sake of any one

else, for no one was with him. What was back of this temptation? You seldom find any attempt made to meet this problem. The fact is that it is an unmistakable testimony to the reality of the struggles of our Master. Whatever his own battles may have been, they were real and not theatrical. They were fought out in the presence of Him who "seeth in secret."

At first there was strong opposition to the practice of fasting in the Christian church. It was regarded as a custom of the old religions, to be abandoned by the believer in Christ. The early literature of Christianity says almost nothing about it. But about one hundred and fifty years after the death of Christ we find the practice becoming quite general. The church took the story of the battle in the desert, and made a ceremony of it. She set aside a time of fasting and penitence. She specified days, adopted rules of abstinence, and entered into details of observance.

Then the same thing happened which we have observed in the case of poverty, grief, and failure. The histrionic spirit took hold of it. There was sham repentance, theatrical humility, the mockery of sacrifice. The Lenten season has been one of the favorite subjects of humorists and satirists. They have delighted in the contrasts it furnishes. They have pictured the ingenuity by which a banquet can be furnished to the pious epicure, without breaking any rule of the fast. The show, the



routine, the shallow self-denial of the luxurious, have all been favorite subjects for cynical comment. To eat no flesh on a certain day, to cease a routine of amusement with the expectation of resuming it as soon as the specified period is over, to add a few extra hours of attendance at services in church, have been pointed out as productive of nothing serious or beautiful.

This attack has not all come from the spirit of unbelief, outside the area of religion. It was Isaiah who cried, "In the days of your fast ye find pleasure." It was Robert Herrick who took from Isaiah the picture of a platter piled high with delicacies, from which the holy gormand goes forth "to show a downcast look, and sour." The seers and teachers of mankind have incessantly warned against this contrast. It is better to break through the whole thing, than to make a mere performance of it.

There is still one thing to be observed. A ceremony as old and universal as that of fasting must have back of it some great truth. The materialists of our day, as usual, have tried to find that truth in something physical. They have called attention to the benefit to health of periods of abstinence, and have found in this fact the origin of the custom. But this is superficial.

The truth behind Lenten observance is to be found in the spirit it seeks to cultivate. Does it produce real penitence? Does it bring the great throng that observes it into the presence of God

with a consciousness of their shortcomings? This is the test. If it does not, it were better to abolish it. Indeed, it is already abolished by that law that condemns everything hollow and heartless. But still the fact remains that no one goes to him in vain, at any time, in any way, with a confession of weakness, or a cry of need. "A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord, thou wilt not despise."











Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.  
Neutralizing agent: Magnesium Oxide  
Treatment Date: April 2005

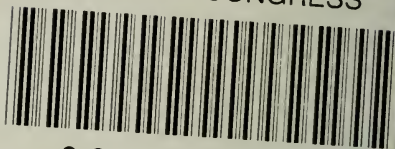
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